

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SINGAP 00842 231057Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 INR-10 L-03 /044 W
-----128572 240152Z /21

R 230830Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9701
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0842

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT GUARANTEE FOR INDOCHINA BOAT REFUGEES

REFS: (A) SINGAPORE 0695, (B) KUALA LUMPUR 1528, (C) SINGAPORE 0790

1. SEAH KIM TECK, DEPUTY CONTROLLER OF SINGAPORE IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT, CONTACTED EMBOFF FEBRUARY 21 CONCERNING THE LETTER OF GUARANTEE GIVEN BY THE EMBASSY FOR THE 55 GATEWAY CITY REFUGEES (REF A). SEAH SAID THAT THE IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT HAS CAREFULLY REVIEWED THIS LETTER AND IS CONCERNED THAT THE GUARANTEE IS LESS THAN IRONCLAD. IMMIGRATION'S CONCERN FOCUSES ON THE PHRASE "ADMISSIBLE TO THE UNITED STATES UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT" USED BY THE EMBASSY TO IDENTIFY THE REFUGEES WHOM THE USG WOULD AGREE TO ACCEPT IF THEY FAILED TO GET THIRD COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT OFFERS. SHOULD ONE OF THESE REFUGEES BE FOUND INADMISSIBLE BY US AND NOT BE ACCEPTED BY A THIRD COUNTRY, SEAH POINTED OUT, UNDER THE TERMS OF THE LETTER, SINGAPORE WOULD THEN BE STUCK WITH HIM.

2. SEAH HAD EARLIER EXPRESSED MISGIVINGS WITH THIS PHRASE WHEN EMBOFF FIRST CONTACTED HIM ABOUT THE GUARANTEE, BUT WAS PRIMARILY CONCERNED AT THAT POINT OVER THE ABSENCE OF A TIME LIMITATION
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ON DEPARTURE OF THE REFUGEES. IMMIGRATION LATER ACCEPTED WITHOUT COMMENT THE GUARANTEE WHEN WE WERE AUTHORIZED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO AMEND IT TO INCLUDE THE THREE-MONTH DEADLINE.

3. ALTHOUGH OUR GUARANTEE FOR THE 55 GATEWAY CITY REFUGEES STANDS AS GIVEN, SEAH SAID IMMIGRATION WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO ACCEPT FUTURE GUARANTEES THAT INCLUDED THIS ADMISSIBILITY CLAUSE, WHICH

THEY CONSIDER A POSSIBLE LOOPHOLE. EMBOFF STRESSED THAT CHANCE OF SINGAPORE BEING SADDLED WITH REFUGEES WAS EXTREMELY REMOTE AS THE PERCENTAGE OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES FOUND NOT ADMISSIBLE WAS VERY SMALL. MOREOVER, EVERY EFFORT WOULD BE MADE TO FIND A THIRD COUNTRY WILLING TO ACCEPT ANY SUCH CASES THAT MIGHT COME UP. SEAH INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT GOS DECISION WAS FIRM.

4. THIS COULD CREATE SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR US IN A FAST MOVING SITUATION WHERE WE WERE TRYING TO OBTAIN THE DEPARTMENT'S AUTHORIZATION TO EXTEND A GUARANTEE FOR REFUGEES ON VERY SHORT NOTICE. SINCE THERE IS NO WAY OF TELLING IN ADVANCE WHEN ANOTHER REFUGEE CASE OF THIS NATURE MAY ARISE, COULD THE DEPARTMENT ADVISE US WHETHER IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO DROP THIS PHRASE IN FUTURE GUARANTEES? OR, IF PHRASE CANNOT BE DROPPED ENTIRELY, DOES THE DEPARTMENT HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR ALTERNATE LANGUAGE WHICH MIGHT BE MORE ACCEPTABLE TO SINGAPORE?

5. WITH REGARD TO THE OVERALL PROBLEM OF BOAT REFUGEES, WE FIND UNHCR REP SAMPATKUMAR'S REMARKS AS QUOTED IN REF B SOMEWHAT MISLEADING. IT IS TRUE THAT MERCHANT VESSELS PICKING UP REFUGEES AT SEA HAVE GENERALLY BEEN ABLE TO DISEMBARK THEM AT SINGAPORE IN RECENT MONTHS. HOWEVER, THIS HAS BEEN DUE ENTIRELY TO THE ABOVE MENTIONED GUARANTEES PROVIDED THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT BY THE CHIEFS OF MISSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENTS INVOLVED, AGREEING TO TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONWARD MOVEMENT OF THE REFUGEES WITHIN THREE MONTHS. IN THE ABSENCE OF THESE
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GUARANTEES, SINGAPORE WILL NOT PERMIT THE REFUGEES TO BE LANDED. UNHCR HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL IN CARING FOR THE REFUGEES ONCE THEY ARE ASHORE IN SINGAPORE, BUT AT THIS STAGE IT HAS HAD ALMOST NOTHING TO DO WITH GETTING THEM ASHORE. (WE SHOULD NOTE IN THIS REGARD THAT THERE HAVE BEEN OCCASIONS WHEN INFORMATION PASSED TO US BY SAMPATKUMAR REGARDING SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES HAS PROVED WRONG, SUGGESTING THAT HE MAY BE SOMEWHAT PRONE TO MISUNDERSTANDING.)

6. WE ALSO NOTE WITH SOME DISAPPOINTMENT THE ABSENCE OF ANY REFERENCE IN SAMPATKUMAR'S COMMENTS AS TO POSSIBLE FUTURE UNHCR INITIATIVES ON ESTABLISHING THE PROPOSED SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP FOR BOAT REFUGEES. THE DEPARTMENT WILL HAVE NOTED THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE ADDRESSED THIS MATTER PUBLICLY DURING HIS PRESS CONFERENCE IN SYDNEY LAST WEEK (REF C), MAKING SPECIFIC PROPOSALS AND REFINING HIS CONDITIONS FOR OPENING THE CAMP. COULD DEPARTMENT OR GENEVA LET US KNOW JUST WHERE THE INITIATIVE LIES AT THIS POINT?
HOLDRIDGE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEES, REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, SEA RESCUES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SINGAP00842
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780085-0189
Format: TEL
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780222/aaaaarye.tel
Line Count: 113
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b14208d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 SINGAPORE 695, 78 KUALA LUMPUR 1528, 78 SINGAPORE 790
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3503740
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RESETTLEMENT GUARANTEE FOR INDOCHINA BOAT REFUGEES
TAGS: SREF, SN, VM
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b14208d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014